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RECENT CRITICISMS OF THE BIBLE.

REV. MR. MORTIMER.

In discussing the question of public biblical criticism, which has been raised by the action of the Rev. Dr. R. Heber Newton, a careful distinction must be made at the outset between that sober, scholarly, and reverent criticism which helps men to a clearer knowledge, and therefore deeper appreciation, of the word of God, and the wild onslaughts upon holy Scripture, which, when addressed to a congregation of persons entirely untrained in the subtle science of criticism, threaten to deprive them of all that is positive in Christianity. Dr. Newton's criticisms are of the latter class. They are, for the most part, either attacks upon the Bible which have been answered again and again, or theories which, supported by one or two brilliant names, have nevertheless not been accepted by anything like a general *consensus* of scholars.

In this article I cannot attempt more than, on the one hand, very briefly to indicate some reasons for not attaching weight to the criticisms of Dr. Newton's school; and, on the other, to point out what I believe to be the cause of the present alarm, and, what is more important, its remedy.

During the present century, the attacks on the Bible have been chiefly along two lines: the objections of physical science, and the difficulties of historical, ethical, and textual criticism. As to natural science, it is always shifting,—the dogmas of to-day becoming the exploded theories of to-morrow. Its point of attack has been chiefly the Mosaic account of creation, and so positive and arrogant has it been that some of weak faith have trembled. But most of these theories have been disproved, and Moses again and again vindicated. For example, a few years ago scientists told us that, as vegetation depended for its growth on the actinic principle in the sun's rays, it was ridiculous to believe, as Moses states, that it appeared on the third day,

while the sunlight was not seen till the fourth. Now, however, it is generally accepted that the peculiar vegetation of the Carboniferous period, which answers to that of the third day, must have been prior to any direct rays of the sun reaching the earth, as it could only have been produced under the conditions of heat, shade, and humidity. So Moses was right, and so-called science wrong; and the point of attack of yesterday is, to-day, an evidence of accuracy in the Mosaic cosmogony, inexplicable apart from a belief in its inspiration. Science, which is always advancing, and therefore always changing, does not so much disperse the darkness in which we are involved, as expose the *ignes fatui* we mistook for light; and, while accepting its theories as working hypotheses in the fields of investigation, surely we may hesitate to apply them to the very different plane of revealed truth.

The study of the annals of the war which unbelieving criticism has waged against the different books of the Bible leads to much the same conclusion. As an instance, let us take the book of Daniel, because the assault on Daniel has been considered by this school one of its greatest triumphs. Let us examine one objection, that the book is historically inaccurate because—

- (1) Belshazzar was not the last king of Babylon;
- (2) The last king was not related to Nebuchadnezzar;
- (3) The last king was not slain at the capture of Babylon.

For some time the enemy seemed to have a very strong case, since Herodotus, Berosus, Abydenus, Ptolemy's Canon, etc., all agree that the name of the last king was Nabonadius, or Labynetus II. He was one of the conspirators who murdered Laborosoarchod, and was not of royal blood; he was at Borsippa when Babylon was taken, afterward surrendered, and, instead of being put to death by Cyrus, was made Governor of Carmania; and further, the name of Belshazzar is not even mentioned by any historian. Altogether, the biblical account seemed irreconcilable with secular history. In 1838, M. Quatremère, in the "*Annales de Philosophie Chrétienne*," suggested as a possible solution of the difficulty that Belshazzar, a scion of the royal family of Nebuchadnezzar, had been associated with Nabonadius in the kingdom, in order to strengthen the usurper's position, just as the first Mameluke Sultan of Egypt was obliged to associate with himself a young child of the family

of Saladin. This was but the hypothesis of a devout and learned critic, who was laboring to explain difficulties in the word of God, and not to make them.

But in 1854 the name of Belshazzar was deciphered from cuneiform inscriptions at one and the same time, independently, by Oppert in Lower Chaldæa and by Rawlinson in England; and later an inscription was translated by Dr. Hinckes, which showed that Belshazzar was the eldest son of Nabonadius, and of royal blood, since the usurper seems to have married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, and that he was made co-regent. He appears to have been intrusted with the defense of Babylon, while the King, after being defeated by Cyrus in the open country, shut himself up in Borsippa, and on learning of the capture of Babylon and death of Belshazzar, surrendered and was made Governor of Carmania.

Here again the point of attack of one age becomes in the next an evidence of extreme accuracy, and this explanation is borne out by a very remarkable and undesigned coincidence. In *Dan.*, v. 16, Belshazzar says that Daniel shall be third ruler of the kingdom. Why third? Because he was only second himself. This is but one instance, but I believe I am acquainted with nearly all that has been advanced against the book of Daniel, and I do not know any objection that has not been satisfactorily answered.

As a science, criticism is in its infancy. Critics even of the same unbelieving school disagree on almost every point except that of endeavoring to destroy as much as possible of the word of God,—to name two of the most celebrated, Ewald and Baur. Ewald is quite certain that the gospel which bears the apostle's name is the work of St. John, and that the Apocalypse is not; Baur, on the other hand, from exactly the same evidence, concludes beyond a doubt that, while the gospel is not St. John's, the Apocalypse is his only authentic work in the New Testament. The Tübingen school, educated in an atmosphere of doubt, and with the tradition that for every critic to start a view of his own is the right thing, doubtless counts in its ranks some great scholars; but we must remember that they are but a small minority among the Biblical scholars of the world, and that men by their training as well fitted as themselves to appreciate the force of a critical objection, have seen no cause to be shaken by these attacks, but have met and replied to them.

But while pointing out thus briefly some reasons for not attaching any great weight to the criticisms of the school of which Dr. Newton is a sort of camp-follower, there is a more important question to be met,—the cause of the present alarm, and its remedy. Here I agree with Dr. Newton on one point, though I dissent very much from the conclusion he draws from it. I mean that the very false position in which the Bible has been placed by its worshipers is the cause of much of the trouble. At the Reformation a set of men, of whom Calvin was a representative, threw off the authority of the Church, and looking around for something to substitute in its place, they thought they had found exactly what they wanted in the Bible. They invented a theory of mechanical inspiration, which they extended to the very letter of the text, and exalted the Bible into a place it was never meant to occupy,—the place of the Church. Protesting against Mariolatry, they substituted for it Bibliolatry; and now that the utter untenableness of this position is being felt, men, as evidenced by Dr. Newton, rush into the other extreme, and the very Protestants (I use the word in its theological sense, as designating those who reject the authority of the Church) who worshiped the Bible, who took for their motto “the Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants,” in their indignation at finding that their idol does not sustain the character they gave it, are the first to attack it and tear it to pieces; and then they wring their hands, and cry, like Micah of old (Judges xviii. 24): “Ye have taken away my gods which I made, . . . and what have I more?” To judge from Dr. Newton’s book, almost nothing.

But let us look back on the history of the Bible, that we may learn its true position. In the first three centuries of the Church’s life, when Christianity was most pure, and Christians most zealous, when, in fact, Christianity converted the world, there was no Bible; so that for every one it can scarcely be essential, either to a true faith or a holy life. Gradually the books of the New Testament were collected, and, together with the Jewish canon of the Old Testament, approved by the Church, while many others, which made the same claim, were rejected. The Church, which existed in all the plenitude of her power before one word of the New Testament was written, approved these books, not because she based her doctrines on them, but because she found these Scriptures in accord with

her teachings, and recognized them as inspired by the same Holy Spirit as herself. It was not till the third Council of Carthage (A. D. 397) that the Church framed her canon of Scripture, and before this the most glorious of the saints and martyrs had lived and died without any Bible, or, at most, with a stray book or two, about the genuineness and authenticity of which they had no certain knowledge; for in those days some of the spurious books were better known than the canonical ones. Then, again, printing was not invented till the fifteenth century, and there were but a few hundred manuscript copies of the Holy Scriptures in the world. It was impossible at that time for the great majority to read the Bible, and yet I see no reason to doubt that there were as good Christians in those fifteen centuries as there have been in the last three.

Meanwhile, we must recollect that it was the Church which first gave the Bible to the world, and the Church which, through all those centuries, preserved the Bible; but while she revered and loved it, and taught it to be the word of God, she never put it into the false position it has occupied in the Protestant religion; she never claimed for it what it does not possess, so exposing it to be torn to pieces by the wolves of unbelieving criticism. She said, it needs an authority on which to rest, and for its right understanding an interpreter; I am both.

The Bible commends itself to my reason and to my heart; but this is not the ground of my faith in it. I believe it because I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, and that Church has said it is the word of God. What the Church has said about the Bible I must believe; where the Church has not spoken, I may follow the opinions of theologians or critics. Now the Church has abundantly witnessed to the fact that the Bible is inspired, but has not put forth any particular theory of inspiration; much less has she countenanced the theory of which Dr. Newton's views are an exaggerated reaction. The writers were inspired to teach moral truth, not history nor science; and their language was the language of their day,—not technical, and yet, I believe, always true. Errors of copyists have crept into the text, but not so as to obscure God's revelation; and the immense variety of slightly different writings is the strongest independent evidence of the purity and accuracy of the text.

There may be uncertainties as to the origin and date of different books of the Bible, but this does not in any way dis-

turb the child of the Church, who has been taught, not that the Bible is a manual of science or history or chronology, but that it is the word of God, able to make him wise unto salvation who rightly studies it, and that it contains, not food for the interesting speculations of human ingenuity, but food for his immortal soul; not a rule of faith which every one can interpret for himself (for his rule of faith is contained in the creeds of the Church), but a means of communion with God, a guide to holiness of life. Critics may prove their theories if they can (though they have not yet done so), and they may rob the poor Protestant of his Bible, but they never can take away one jot or tittle of what the Church has given to her children.

Some may say, are you not, after all, recognizing Dr. Newton's position? No; for he is practically driven to confess that man has no certain means of discovering or testing truth. He admits that there is some truth in the Bible, a sort of residuum which will be left when critics have finished boiling it down, just as there is in the Vedas or Koran, only rather more of it; but no one can tell when that residuum is reached. The only authorities he knows are the Bible and his own judgment. He seems to think the Bible very untrustworthy, and the mistakes of his book prove that his judgment is not a very reliable guide. So he is like a ship on the ocean without rudder or anchor, shifting her course with every change of wind, drifting no one knows where.

Is not Dr. Newton's teaching, then, greatly to be feared? Will not its effects be disastrous to the Church? No; doubtless it may seriously injure the souls of some individuals, although probably most of his followers have not much faith to lose; but the gates of hell can never prevail against the Church, and while deeply deploring the scandal he as a priest of the Church has caused, it is not difficult to see how out of the evil God may bring good, and how Dr. Newton may be an instrument in breaking down that very Protestantism of which he is the logical representative; for when people have got over their first fright, and have begun to think, many will feel

- (1) That they cannot live without religion.
- (2) That they cannot rest on the canon, "the Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants."
- (3) That there is but one resting-place, the Church of Christ.

License to think and believe what they please may be sweet while its novelty lasts ; but when men have grown tired of change and seek rest, and, like Noah's dove, find no resting-place, they will gladly return to the ark of the Church, there to abide until the floods of human doubt have subsided ; and in a new heaven and new earth they see and know all things clearly.

ALFRED G. MORTIMER.

REV. DR. NEWTON.

BIBLICAL criticism, as a literary specialty, is practically the work of our generation. It has grown up in the face of great obstacles. If it were not a true child of the *zeit-geist* it would have died out long since, under the abuse its infant voice called forth.

It has, on the contrary, lived and flourished ; finding itself, like other human naughtinesses, first pitied, then endured, and at length embraced. Every movement of thought, in the church and in the world, has stirred up questions lying in its sphere. Physical science in particular has forced on the reluctant churches a re-opening of the judgment passed upon the Bible. Every effort to arrest proceedings has proven futile. He is strangely deaf to the voices in the air who does not recognize that this case is called for a new hearing. The nature of the Bible is plainly the next great issue in the historic progress of Christianity. It ought not to be difficult to see the reason of this fact. While men are content under an absolute rule, that rule must, on the whole, be suited to their condition. When they grow restive, the yoke must be galling their necks. In the church, as in the state, external authority is undoubtedly a necessity for men in the earlier stages of development. Until the reason is so far educated, and the spiritual consciousness is so far awakened, that man shall of himself own and obey the Eternal Laws, there must be a king by right divine, commanding thought. Sooner or later, it is inevitable that the growing mind of man shall question any external authority in religion. If it is free to do so, it may peacefully work over again the old beliefs into new forms of faith ; if it is forbidden to do so, it at once suspects the authority that shrinks from the light, and is thus in danger of throwing away the belief imposed. While

every new thought must be haled before a Papa or Pope, whether seated on a Church or on a book, there can be no inquiry and no progress. If the advance of knowledge establishes an error in an ancient decision of this supreme tribunal, and the fact is met by an insistence upon its infallibility, a revolution is inevitable. We ought to have learned the truth of this from our late adulatory commemoration of the monk Martin. Three hundred years ago it was an infallible Church which provoked a revolt. Now it is an infallible Book. The one alone ultimate authority for truth is Reason. Faith must be so shaped intellectually as to be reasonable. It can be so shaped. Being so fashioned, it will be found to be the substance of our fathers' faith,—unless Christianity be a delusion. But, as said, the one condition of this remolding of belief is freedom. This I understand to be the animus of the revolt which is spreading so fast through the churches against the traditional view of the Bible.

This has been the secret of the instinct drawing the churches toward biblical criticism. It has not been the fresh interest gathering around these old writings, under the new lights of criticism, that has attracted men to this study, wonderful as this change has been; but it has been the discovery, in these new lights, that the book once supposed to have dropped out of the skies, as a meteorite, really belongs to human "letters," and as such is no infallible despot over the intellect and conscience. Whatever the ultimate results of criticism concerning literary details, the immediate general result concerning theology is that men of open minds who have followed this study carefully, have experienced a complete disillusion as to the nature of the Bible. That is an accomplished fact with a considerable body of the clergy in all churches. That body is certain to increase rapidly. Already the lines are drawn between the elder and the younger clergy, and the young men have the day before them. This is most surely a victory for religion, which, as it thus gains freedom to think, will think itself peacefully into new clothes, and go on with its benign work in the world.

We thus find the key to the problem proposed—the wisdom of popularizing the new biblical criticism. With those who see no need of any theological moulting, there can be no discussion of such an issue. The priests who stood waiting to see Uzziah drop dead could hardly be asked to debate the propriety of everybody's free handling of the Ark. But many men who

sympathize with the new criticism sincerely hesitate about throwing open to the people the halls where scholars are discussing its problems. Their objections appear to sum themselves much as follows: (1) Criticism is still too uncertain of its conclusions to justify its going before the public. (2) It as yet, therefore, belongs properly to scholars alone, the clergy being allowed within their privileged inclosure *ex officio*. (3) The premature agitation of its questions will only spread doubt and demoralization. (4) The urgent need of our age is positive teaching rather than "mere destructive criticism." (5) The people are themselves unripe for such truths. The answer to these objections can, of course, be only outlined.

First. As to the immaturity of biblical criticism, a word is sufficient. There is plainly no such *consensus* established among scholars as will warrant any one in proclaiming dogmatically a new set of conclusions, touching the details of authorship, date, structure, etc., of the various writings of the Bible, in place of the old theories. This purely literary aspect of the study, however, probably goads few minds to immediate utterance. As already said, it is the bearing of this study upon the general nature of the Bible which really gives it so deep an interest to the clerical mind, and which prompts to its communication to the people. And this changed light is spread over the book by the spirit of criticism without waiting for its completed results. It already leads men into a thorough realization of the purely literary character of the books of this library, and that is all which is needed or desired in the interest of theological reform. Few care to prove Ewald's six narrators in the Pentateuch, or Kuenen's date of its last edition, or Goldziher's mythical interpretation of its personages; while many care greatly to prove its general nature, as no literal history, extracted from the pages of Moses' Journal, where it had been written under the dictation of Jehovah, but a late composition, embodying the traditions and legends and myths of the Hebrews,—thus dissolving the superstitious view of this book, which antagonizes science, burdens faith with superfluous miracles, posts a supernatural priesthood at the foundation of religion, and thus blocks all theological readjustments.

Second. Concerning the new criticism, as a subject fitted as yet only for the knowledge of the clergy, it is almost enough to clothe in words the feeling which appears to have whispered

itself among the brethren in some professional conclaves, when no reporters were present.

How is a clergyman who has gradually come to see the Bible in a new light to go on preaching as though no change had come over his vision? The Bible provides the chief subject-matter of his sermons, and his view of it will necessarily shape his handling of that material. He cannot avoid betraying his changed thought, except through a systematic repression of his convictions, which will eat out the finest fiber of his being. And as these new lights creep out through chinks of his sermons, his people, if ordinarily intelligent, will suspect the change he may not confess. That vague suspicion will be infinitely more harmful than the frankest utterance. Its first effect will be to taint the pulpit with insincerity. The last blow to the waning power of the pulpit will be given when this suspicion spreads. Some time since there appeared a pitiful letter in "The Spectator," from a clergyman, asking how the clergy could regain their influence over the laity. It was followed by a note from a layman saying, pithily, "Persuade the laity of your honesty." There are times when silence stabs faith. Such "reserve" will certainly lead into that ancient and fatal snare of religion, in every land and under every creed,—the growth of an esoteric faith of the scholarly few behind an exoteric faith of the unscholarly many. With the advance of knowledge every civilization has seen such a divorce of classes. The traditional stories of the gods have been resolved by the learned into myths and legends, which have furnished pleasant pastures for scholarly priests within their cloistered walls, while in the outer courts of the temples these priests have gone on repeating the old tales as literal truths. Thus the masses have been left stagnating in puerile superstitions, which have spread a dry-rot through religion, while the few thoughtful minds of the people have been driven into a revolt, in which all belief has been thrown off scornfully as a fraud of priestcraft. Is this the tale of history which wise and conservative doctors would have repeat itself in Christianity?

Third. When it is said that the opening of this criticism will spread doubt and unbelief, and will thus lead to great demoralization, an undeniable truth is uttered, which may well "give us pause" in any overhasty action, but which should, by no means, cause us to abandon the endeavor to acquaint the

people wisely and reverently with the truth. It is very sad that it should be so; but when was it ever otherwise in the history of religious progress, or when is it likely to be otherwise in the future? Majorities, as our English Isaiah told us over his eyeglass, are always wrong.

Every new season in which Religion has felt moved to change her clothes has found hosts of distressed souls exclaiming that the new dress was no dress at all,—a scanty apron of fig-leaves at best, sure to display her nakedness, and never cut from celestial fashion-plates. Socrates was to the Athenians a denier of the gods and a “corrupter of the youth.” Jesus was condemned by the priests of the church on the charge of “blasphemy.” Paul and his disciples were “atheists”; and as for Brother Martin, with his new-fangled notions about a fallible Church, was he not known to have been begotten by a hellish incubus on the body of Hans Luder’s wife, as the very Anti-Christ? In truth, an ooze and thaw of faith has come with every spring-time. Belief has seemed to be deliquescing in a slush of doubt. Skepticism has grown rank, and has rotted into immorality; yet none the less has the summer worn on apace, the new growth of faith ripened, and in due time been garnered in a creed which has fed man through another chill winter of the soul. The new view of the Bible is spreading doubt! Is then the old view of the Bible making no doubters? Are our educated classes being lulled into happy dreams of faith by the pleasant stories of Lot’s wife and Elisha’s bears, of Jonah’s big fish and of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace? Is the mission of Moses proven to our age, not in the self-evidencing of the sublime spiritual truth with which he is sent of God to the nation, but in the sight which the legend gives us of his training under Yahweh to beat the Egyptian magicians? Is the character of God cleared from the clouds that nature’s anomalies gender, by having the savageries and bestialities, the superstitions and blasphemies of the early Hebrews, thrust upon us as the very word of God? Is the historical reality of the Holy Christ certified to us on the authority of that reasonable and reputable Type of the Messiah — Samson?

Are the stalwarts of orthodoxy really prepared to recommend such heroic treatment for the malaria of doubt? Judging from the late General Convention of the Episcopal Church, we might

conclude that they are. Grave and learned doctors seriously and warmly debated whether the word of God would continue to be heard if Balaam's ass were not allowed to speak in the new lectionary! "Sometimes an ass may speak and act more wisely than a man," said one delegate — an admission, drawn from that fellow-feeling which makes us wondrous kind, amply justified by the almost unanimous vote of the dioceses on the question whether the ass should continue to visit our churches and bray his message!

Every candid man ought surely to know that faith in the Bible, as the record of a real revelation from God, is to-day honey-combed with questionings, because the stale cry "all or none" is dinned into men's ears from the pulpit and the press. The atmosphere of our age makes the unnecessary miraculousness of the early part of the Old Testament unbelievable.

Our very children feel it and puzzle their poor mothers. Young men are rashly throwing away their Bibles as outworn, and concluding Christianity a fraud. For several years a gifted orator has been lecturing through the country, to crowded audiences, sowing, so say the clergy, broadcast the seeds of infidelity. What has given him this power to break down faith? Not all his rare eloquence and resistless wit could have availed to close a single Bible had the Churches taught men to read it rationally. The clergy have held up the Bible-fetich against which he has poured his merciless invectives. They have feathered his straight arrows and sharpened his barbed jokes. From that reasonable thought of the Bible which the clergy ought by their education to have gained, and which they ought to have taught the people, his shafts would have fallen harmless, their points blunted into flatness.

Fourth. As to the supreme need of positive teaching in our age, and its safe action in sloughing off effete notions, there can be no question. Whatever it be that a preacher really believes "in his heart," that should undoubtedly constitute the staple of his preaching, and be chiefly trusted to displace the errors of his hearers. The inner and spiritual aspect of the Bible, which must be before every honest minister, in some light, as a real word of God, should be constantly thrown into the foreground of his sermons. He would be, indeed, a tyro in character-culture who expected to fatten souls on mere negations, whether about the

Bible or about the beliefs bodied in it. But the soundest principle may be pushed too far.

The subjects on which a preacher can be positive to-day, are the purely spiritual verities. These are not seriously in question. Our difficulties in religion lie in the intellectual strata of truth. Man is made up with reasoning powers as well as with intuitions. His understanding must be helped, if only so far as will lead him where he can see that which will cause him to be silent and to trust the instinct of the soul. A secondary duty of the pulpit to-day is to go, cautiously but fearlessly, to the help of the reason meshed in the toils of doubt. This involves more or less of so-called negative work. Truth is always correlative. To affirm anything is to deny some other thing. One cannot say that a horse is black, without implying that it is not white. If the hearer holds to a belief in the correlative of a speaker's affirmation, this positive word comes to him as a negation. He will ask why his thought is contradicted, and how that contradiction is substantiated. Some amount of negative work is therefore a necessity, if there are to be any intellectual processes carried on. Nature knows no constructive agencies which are not destructive forces, in the mental as in the physical world. The measure of that negative and destructive work, and the methods of it, must be left to the judgment of individual teachers—which it will painfully exercise.

A teacher cannot shut himself up to positive affirmations of the spiritual character of the Bible, in an age which is steeped in the traditional thought of a miraculous book. Teacher and taught will find themselves, under such preaching, in puzzling cross-lights.

The preacher will discover that his reverence for the word of God contained in the Bible, turns, in the layman's mind, into a superstitious awe of the books in which that divine word is articulated, according to man's poor powers. He will find his positive truth bolstering up positive errors that sorely need to come toppling down, in order to a reconstruction of faith. If he incidentally recurs to the thought of a distinction between the divine and the human elements in the Bible, he will find his more thoughtful people asking, How are we to frame a conception of the Bible as at once the word of God and the words of men, and how are we to apply this general principle to par-

ticular writings? Some systematic instruction of his people will be forced upon him. And, if he fears the "mere destructive criticism" which this instruction will entail, he may comfort himself by recalling the experience through which he himself was freed from slavery to the letter of the Bible. Did he gain that emancipation by dwelling wholly on its positive, spiritual truths alone? Did he not gain it through an intellectual study of its literary character—through criticism? Did he not suffer an eclipse of those heavenly lights for a longer or a shorter time, as the shadow of criticism stole across the sky? And did that obscuration end, thoroughly and happily, except as, instead of trying to drive the opaque knowledge back, it was welcomed out before the face of the sun, and proven to be after all transparent by the old light's bursting through the veil? Why should he expect any other process to be ordained for his people?

Do laymen belong to another species of the genus homo, concerning whom it is unsafe to argue from the clerical nature? What clergyman that has trusted truth and spoken honestly to his people—if under the guidance of that Spirit which said of old, "I, Prudence, dwell with Wisdom"—has not found that he has at length renewed a solid faith in them, through the same way by which he himself was led back to the heart of the old belief? And in truth, it is quite time to have done, among educated people, with the cant of "mere destructive criticism." Biblical criticism is no more merely destructive than is any other new knowledge, which always pulls down some old thought in cleaning the ground for its higher revelation. It destroys such of the traditional theories concerning the authorship, date, structure, aim, etc., of the biblical writings as were unsound; but it settles firmly on solid ground such of these traditions as were substantial, while it builds up, in the place of the errors it has uprooted, knowledge of a very positive character, giving a new and powerful realism to books that were the most unreal in the sacred canon. It destroys the effete notion of the Bible as a miraculous, perfect, and infallible book, the supreme arbiter over reason and conscience; but it constructs a rational idea of the Bible, as the human records of most real revelations in the consciousness of the people of religion—the record of the highest historic manifestation of God, in the person of Jesus Christ; and it leaves our spiritual natures free to go to this book for comfort and cheer, for light

and inspiration, without hearing the mocking whispers of our critical faculties. It is this hated and abused "mere destructive criticism" which has plainly come, under Providence, in the right hour, to save our fathers' Bible, and to hand it on to our children in a new version, readable by the reason and thus believable by the soul. Its fruits seem now perhaps rather hard and juiceless, and sour on our taste; but let them have time and they will soften and sweeten. Thus it will be found anew that "by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

Fifth. All other objections sum themselves into the feeling—and what so hard to grapple with as a feeling!—that, whatever may be the abstract wisdom or necessity of popularizing biblical criticism, the people are not yet ripe for it. Unripe movements, we are told, always fail. A revolution that arrives ahead of time proves an abortion. A reform that runs too fast gets a bad fall, which lames it, if it is not killed outright.

Many friends of the new thought of the Bible fear that it is ahead of Providence's time-table, and are signaling "slow up." One may well ask, with all respect to these careful brakesmen, what are to be the signs that this new thought is due. Would it be rash to suggest an answer, in part, as follows: When the old thought has become vague and unreal; when it has thus lost its former moral and religious power; when its light is viewed suspiciously, and men no longer walk in it buoyantly; when its veracity is questioned, and its authority stands impeached; when its marvels serve to point the flippant jest, and the thunder of its voices of judgment no longer awes the conscience; when the dust gathers upon it on men's book-shelves, and mothers open it on the nursery tables with puzzled minds and troubled hearts; when the prattle of children's tongues anticipate the results of the scholar in his library; then, surely, the time has come for a new thought of this venerable book! Religious teachers may well hear again the plaint of the Master—Can ye not discern the signs of the times?

In what cloistered shades have the good souls dwelt, who do not see that, despite the care of the rabbins, biblical criticism is out among the people? The Bible for Learners has not asked leave of the churches to get itself printed; and, though pious book-sellers look well around the store before handing it down, it is bought and read, with many another kindred book.

The new criticism is leaking from hosts of pulpits, and is tincturing editorials. It is soaking into the body of public opinion, and is charging the atmosphere of society. It is "in the air" even now. Its popularizing cannot be prevented. That work may be left to an unspiritual rationalism, which will needlessly disturb by it the historic rootings of Christianity, or to a crass infidelity, which will use it to raise a rank crop of irreligiousness. It may, on the other hand, be preoccupied by a devout Christian learning, and made to feed a fresh and vigorous growth of faith, a belief in the Bible at once rational and reverent.

This seems about the only choice left to the Church. Not long since, in a meeting of gentlemen, all of whom were men of business, a leading banker said, with the approval of the company: "The trouble with the clergy is that the laity are ahead of them on this matter: they have made up their minds upon the general nature of the Bible." Where least suspected the negative spirit of the new criticism has stolen abroad, and the task of the clergy is to follow it with the constructive work, which can only be done by frankly owning the destruction that has been wrought.

Circumstances have lately placed the writer of this paper in a position which brought him in contact with a class of facts concerning this question that are not ordinarily laid bare. Could the letters that have come in to him be given to the public,—letters from ministers who have ceased to preach; from mothers fearing to talk with their little ones; from men who have found new faith through the "mere destructive criticism"; from those who for the lack of the view of the Bible to which it leads have dropped away from the Christian churches,—they would yield the best practical confirmation of the position taken in this paper.

Senator Blair recently stated that the general testimony of the leaders of labor organizations before the Senate Committee, was to the effect that the Evangelical Churches were steadily and rapidly losing hold of the working-men of this country. In connection with this statement, a few extracts from a working-man's letter may yield food for further thought upon this topic:

"With respect to religion, I find either a gross superstition, a knavish cant, or a boldly avowed infidelity. . . . The infidelity is a want of correct knowledge and teaching of the true aim of religion. . . . It (this

new thought of the Bible) has taken away the rubbish that encumbered those truths (the 'eternal truths' to which he had just referred). I knew that inspiration from God was in the Bible, but you have shown me where to look for it. 'The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.' . . . Religion is misconstrued on account of its old setting. It has grown out of its old clothes. . . . You said you were sorry that the meat to your flock had proven poison to others. It is not so. We want more and more of such meat. The great body of men are hungering for it. We want the truth. It is the only thing that can make us free."

R. HEBER NEWTON.